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CAPITOL VIEW PRESERVATION STUDY

February 1983

Second Printing January 1984

City of Austin

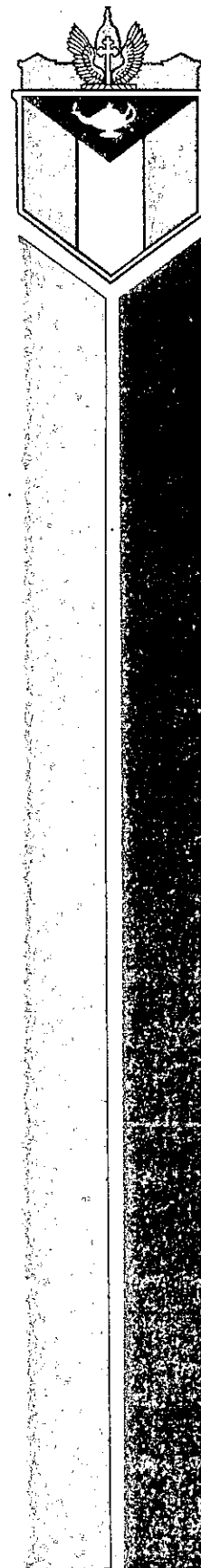


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CAPITOL VIEW PRESERVATION STUDY

February 1983

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CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	1
II.	HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE	3
III.	AUSTIN'S SKYLINE HISTORY	6
IV.	CAPITOL VIEW PRESERVATION AND THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN	8
V.	METHODOLOGY	10
VI.	CAPITOL VIEW CORRIDOR MAPS	
	Congress Avenue Capitol View Corridor	
	Waterloo Park Capitol View Corridor	
	Wooldridge Park Capitol View Corridor	
	Overview, Southwestern Capitol View Corridors	
	Zilker Park Capitol View Corridor	
	Lamar Bridge Capitol View Corridor	
	University of Texas South Mall Capitol View Corridor	
	Lyndon Baines Johnson Library Capitol View Corridor	
	Longhorn Shores Capitol View Corridor	
	IH-35 Capitol View Corridor	
	Capitol Viewpoints Adjacent to IH-35	
VII.	ANALYSIS	14
VIII.	VIEW PROTECTION IN OTHER CITIES	17
	FOOTNOTES	19
	SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	20
	COMPOSITE CAPITOL VIEW CORRIDOR MAP	
	DRAMATIC GLIMPSE VIEW CORRIDOR MAP	

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GENERAL INFORMATION INSERT

The Capitol View Preservation Study was endorsed by the City Council in June 1983. At that time, the Council asked for a map depicting the Dramatic Glimpse view corridors. This map has been included in this second printing.

A "90-day Interim Review Ordinance" applies to all proposed new construction in the downtown area that will exceed sixty feet in height. The purpose of this ordinance is to afford review of structures in the core area of the City of Austin. Reviews may be conducted by the Downtown Revitalization Task Force and the Planning Commission. Building permits may not be issued for 90 days and until the required Planning Commission review has been completed. A recommendation to have the City Council waive the remainder of the 90-day waiting period may be requested when the applicant seeks Planning Commission review.

An amendment to the "90-day Interim Review Ordinance" has been proposed and will most likely be considered by the City Council in February 1984. This amendment includes expanding the review to include the Historic Landmark Commission; it also proposes new language to provide specifically for consideration of the identified view corridors outside of the downtown area.

Also in February 1984, the City of Austin hopes to award a contract for an Economic and Legal Assessment of the Capitol View Preservation Study. The Economic and Legal Assessment should provide -- when the consultants have completed all phases of their work -- information that will be helpful to the City Council, Planning Commission, advisory boards and commissions, City staff and residents of Austin in the evaluation of alternatives to best protect views of the State Capitol dome. The assessment is expected to be completed in approximately six months.

Information concerning Capitol View protection may be obtained from the Comprehensive Planning Division of the City of Austin Planning Department, located in the Municipal Annex at 301 West Second Street (Second Floor) or by calling 477-6511 ext. 2554.

(Insert to CVPS Jan. 1984)

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CAPITOL VIEW PRESERVATION STUDY

City of Austin

Planning Department

February 1983

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I. INTRODUCTION

The unique significance and public value of the Capitol of Austin's skyline prompted the Capitol View Preservation Study. Although recent highrise construction has diminished the Capitol's traditional dominance, it is still possible to preserve many important views. This study identifies Capitol views of greatest value to the people of Austin and the State of Texas and proposes methods for their protection.

PART I, INTRODUCTION, outlines the contents of the study.

PART II, HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE, presents the Capitol and discusses some of the traditional and contemporary reasons for maintaining a prominent Statehouse.

PART III, AUSTIN'S SKYLINE HISTORY, sketches Austin's development and the emergence of Capitol view preservation as a public issue.

PART IV, CAPITOL VIEW PRESERVATION AND THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN, discusses citizens' concern for their visual resources as expressed in the Plan, and the response by public officials that led to the present study.

PART V, METHODOLOGY, explains the criteria for identifying views of greatest public value through an inventory and evaluation of remaining views.

PART VI, CAPITOL VIEW CORRIDOR MAPS, displays the ten view corridors determined to be of greatest public value, showing view corridor boundaries, height allowances for sample properties, current zoning heights, important viewpoints and representative photographs.

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PART VII, ANALYSIS, assigns corridors to implementation categories based on the degree of restrictions, land ownership patterns, development characteristics, and the quality of viewing experience available.

PART VIII, VIEW PRESERVATION IN OTHER MAJOR CITIES, briefly cites pertinent examples from other cities' efforts to protect their visual resources. The Composite Capitol View Corridor Map and Dramatic Glimpse View Corridor Map, folded and inserted at the end of this document, show the extent of the Capitol View Preservation Study area.

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II. HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

"The way mankind intervenes at the junction of land and sky is one of the meaningful measures of civilization."

-- Wayne Attoe, Skylines

The Capitol is, symbolically, the center of Texas. As the dome rises over the seat of government, it proclaims the heritage and achievements of a state that was once a republic. Austin is privileged to host the Capitol; the honor and responsibility of maintaining a complimentary urban setting resides with the capital city on behalf of its citizens and visitors.

In its skyline setting, the Capitol distinguishes Austin from other cities. Even among U.S. state capitals, the Statehouse of Texas is an impressive monument. Architectural critic and historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock described Texas's Capitol: "Of all the capitols of the Gilded Age, Austin's ... was most like a parody of the national Capitol ... Sharp of line, sensitive in texture, the huge mass is even more impressive because of the rough quarry finish. There is a mountainlike grandeur and variety to the Capitol. Evening brings a purple cast to the earth-red surfaces; at daybreak the granite is the gold of the sun."¹

The symbolic situation of the Capitol on the hill is as old as the Capitolium in Rome, site of the ancient temple of Vesta. The Capitolium crowned and gathered its surroundings into a distinct urban entity. Viewing the Capitolium, citizens were reminded of their civic duties and their heritage. Such symbolism persisted into the Gilded Age of American state-house construction. As H. R. Hitchcock said, "Through two hundred years

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the authority of the symbols can be seen in every Capitol." Between the Civil War and 1890 thirteen states built their capitols on templed hills.²

The Capitol is more than an architectural accomplishment; it represents accumulated legends and history that distinguish Texas from other states. As Washington and Jefferson had visions of an American Rome on the Potomac, so Edwin Waller and Mirabeau B. Lamar envisioned a Texan Rome on the Colorado. From wilderness that was to become the Capitol hill, Lamar voiced his aspirations for the new Republic of Texas in 1839: "This should be the seat of future empire."

Capitol dominance is part of Austin's history. The site at the head of Congress Avenue was chosen by Waller for its visual command of the territory. Austin's original city plan was a grid oriented to the cardinal points, with an axially centered Capitol. According to Roman prototype, such a plan with spectacular Dome established urban order. The Capitol was intended to prevail over other structures, as community responsibilities were to dominate private concerns.

It was fifty years before Texas, no longer a republic, had a Capitol that fulfilled the potential of its site. Dramatically situated, 311 feet tall and crowned with its Dome, the Capitol was created to command the countryside. At the dedication ceremony in 1889, State Senator Temple Houston said,

"Texas stands peerless amid the mighty and her brow is crowned with bewildering magnificence. This building fires the heart and excites reflections in the minds of all."³

The combined significance of the Capitol and its setting requires a respectful viewing distance for appreciation. On viewing the Capitol from Mt. Bonnell, a view now blocked, a contemporary of Senator Houston said,

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" ... the great shining dome of the State Capitol soaring high above all other symbols of the commercial world, surmounted by the figure of justice (Goddess of Liberty) with hand outstretched ... in the native granite of the giant edifice is stored the dream of our Texas pioneers who realized this site as the loveliest in all the state for that building to be."⁴

Tourists and residents seek vantage points for skyline viewing.

Residents may serve as tour guides, instructing and orienting visitors by drawing their attention to landmarks. Others search the skyline for the familiar silhouette as an emblem of stability. Features of high visibility and public sentiment serve to enhance a sense of identity and encourage an awareness of, and loyalty to, place.⁵ It is said that Carl Jung, fighting madness, avoided disintegration of his personality by continually reminding himself that he was a citizen of a particular city with enduring features.⁶ To find familiar Capitol views blocked by new construction is a disorienting reminder of the rapid pace of urban change.

According to the Roman ideal, a city should preserve the visible symbols of its identity to give citizens security in a mutable world. The Capitol View Preservation Study is based on the enduring public value of a highly visible State Capitol. Austin's skyline can express a balance between economic vitality and a time honored symbol, maintaining civic image and character on behalf of all citizens.

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III. AUSTIN'S SKYLINE HISTORY

The Capitol remained dominant well into the twentieth century: few dramatically large structures interrupted Austin's skyline unless they were of public significance. From their respective hilltops, the tower of the University of Texas's Main Building (1889) and St. Edward's University (1903) established visible evidence of the importance of education in Austin's community life.

Two- and three-story structures prevailed at the commercial hub of the city, 6th and Congress, until the ten-story Scarbrough Building (1910), and the nine-story Littlefield Building (1911) broke the traditional height barrier. Skyscrapers were in vogue in Chicago and New York and architecture in Austin followed their distant example. Many objected to the height of these buildings as inappropriate, given the desirability of maintaining Capitol dominance.

In 1935 the University of Texas replaced its Old Main Building with the Tower that has, with the Capitol dome, come to symbolize Austin. Widely-recognized and acclaimed, the pair follows the tower-and-dome tradition of great cities such as Rome, Florence, Washington, D.C., recalling the international aspirations of Austin's founders.

Early Texans could not foresee that technology and economy would demand highrise structures. In 1965, proposals for the twenty-five story Westgate Building, immediately adjacent to the Capitol, sent State legislators scrambling to condemn and purchase the property. The attempt failed in the House of Representatives by two votes. Representative Henry Grover,

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who sponsored the proposed legislation, said,

"If the trend toward highrise buildings near the Capitol and UT continues, the Capitol will be obliterated from view, unnecessarily destroying much of the beauty and charm of the city of Austin and of the Capitol grounds."

Public criticism accompanied the Westgate construction and continues with similar projects, especially when Capitol views are threatened. Highrise structures now block the Capitol from such important viewpoints as St. Edward's University, Mt. Bonnell, Municipal Auditorium, Taniguchi Gardens, and most of Zilker Park.

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IV. CAPITOL VIEW PRESERVATION AND THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

In 1974 the City of Austin began the Austin Tomorrow Goals Program to revise the City's master plan. Thousands of citizens participated in articulating the goals, objectives and policies that were to become the Austin Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan. They noted Austin's threatened visual resources, and urged preservation of those features that distinguish Austin from other cities. The Capitol is paramount among such features. The Capitol View Preservation Study implements the following goals from Chapter II, Urban Design, of the Comprehensive Plan.

Goal 110.0

Assure that the development of the urban environment is compatible with the unique natural and constructed features of the Austin area.

Goal 120.0

Protect and improve the desirable image and character of neighborhoods and districts.

Goal 130.0

Improve the relationship between surface transportation networks and their adjacent environments.

Goal 140.0

Improve existing pedestrian environments and adequately provide for pedestrian amenities in proposed urban development.

Goal 150.0

Preserve those elements which reflect the varied historical, architectural and cultural inheritance in Austin.

The Planning Commission, appointed by the City Council, is responsible for making, amending and implementing the Comprehensive Plan. Responding to public concern, the Commission instructed the City Planning Department in 1981 to investigate ways of protecting Capitol views. Initial view protection

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efforts were to be limited to views of greatest public value.

This provision, and the methodology that follows from it, distinguishes current view protection recommendations from previous efforts. The present study concentrates on specific public views. Sightlines between viewpoints and the Capitol determine the allowable heights necessary for view preservation. A blanket height limit of 653 feet, previously proposed by the Planning Commission, would maintain Capitol dominance generally, but it would not address the requirements of particular views.

Chapter IV of the Austin Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan describes a system of Growth Management Areas. Priority Area I, approximately Austin's Central Business District (CBD), has highest priority for development intensification and provision of urban amenities. As the Capitol is located in the center of the CBD, all view corridors include some Priority Area I land.

To further the CBD revitalization objectives of the Plan while balancing multiple downtown goals, the City Council appointed the Downtown Revitalization Task Force in November 1981. Capitol view preservation has emerged as part of a comprehensive downtown planning effort under the auspices of this group. The Planning Department staff has worked closely with members of the Task Force in developing the methodology and recommendations of this study. The Planning Commission, Landmark Commission and City Council have also met with the staff to review the study as it progressed.

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V. METHODOLOGY

The methodology described below provides an evaluative technique for concentrating protective efforts on Capitol views of greatest public value. Pursuant to Policy 111.1 of the Austin Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan, Planning Department staff surveyed the unique visual features and landmarks in Austin, noting their statewide, citywide and local significance. These features, with the Capitol, define Austin's image and character. The Capitol View Preservation Study began at these locations with an inventory of remaining views. More than sixty views in which the Capitol dome was visible were identified for priority consideration, mapped and photographically documented.

These views were classified into four categories:

Stationary Views offer extensive pedestrian viewing opportunities;

Threshold Views are roadway views that mark the transition from a neighborhood or highway into the Central Business District;

Sustained Approaches permit the traveler a continuous view of the Capitol on a lengthy stretch of roadway;

Dramatic Glimpses allow a brief but spectacular viewing opportunity.

To assess the importance of the sixty viewpoints, three aspects of the viewing experience were examined:

The VIEW FRAME, the visual image seen by the viewer when looking toward the Capitol, was analyzed. The following questions were asked:

- Is the dome isolated, crowded or partially eclipsed?

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- Is the dome dominant, prominent or merely clearly visible?
- Is the view at night more dramatic than by day?
- What other elements are present in the picture? Vegetation? Water? Buildings of particular significance? U.T. Tower?

VIEWPOINT information included its significance in the community, its elevation and distance from the Capitol, its compass orientation in relation to the Capitol, and the function and use patterns of its site.

Finally, the characteristics of the VIEW CORRIDOR, the area defined by the sightlines from the viewpoint to points 100 feet on either side of the centerline of the Capitol dome, were noted. The 100 feet protective radius is intended to prevent crowding of the dome within a view frame. View corridor analyses include the land area and distance covered, topographic changes, an indication of predominant land uses and development characteristics, and a list of public assets and amenities within the view corridor.

After studying the information gathered and discussing it with members of the Downtown Revitalization Task Force, Planning staff defined ten composite view corridors for further study. Each corridor contained a variety of view types and viewing situations.

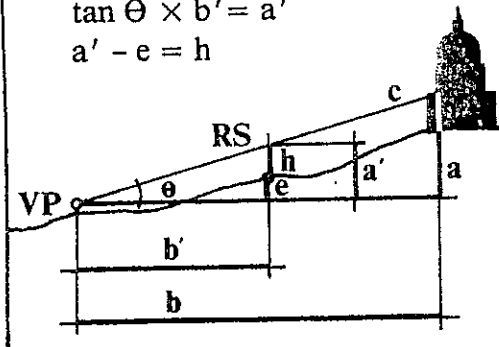
According to the results of the analyses, the only effective way to preserve these views is to establish height allowances within each view corridor defined by the sightline elevation from the viewpoint to the base of the Capitol dome, 653 feet above mean sea level. The Capitol View Preservation Height Calculation Formula was developed to determine height allowances for any property within a view corridor.

Capitol View Preservation Height Calculation Formula

$$\tan \theta = \frac{a}{b} = \frac{a'}{b'}$$

$$\tan \theta \times b' = a'$$

$$a' - e = h$$



VP = Viewpoint

RS = Review Site

a = 653' - VP elevation

b = Distance, VP to Capitol

c = Sightline to Capitol

e = RS elevation
- VP elevation

a' = VP elevation to
sightline at RS

b' = Distance, VP to RS

h = Allowable height

According to the Height Calculation Formula, changes in topography and distance from the Capitol result in allowable heights that vary for each property under review. Generally, the closer the viewpoint is to the Capitol, the more restrictive are the allowable heights in that corridor. By the same geometry, the closer a reviewed property is to a viewpoint, the greater the restriction on that property.

Current zoning was noted and sample height calculations for underdeveloped properties were performed; comparisons were made between existing zoning and protective height allowances.

The above analysis gives indication of the significant factors operating in each view corridor. Implementation strategies emerge based on the predominance of public or private land ownership, development characteristics, severity of height restrictions and the quality of available viewing

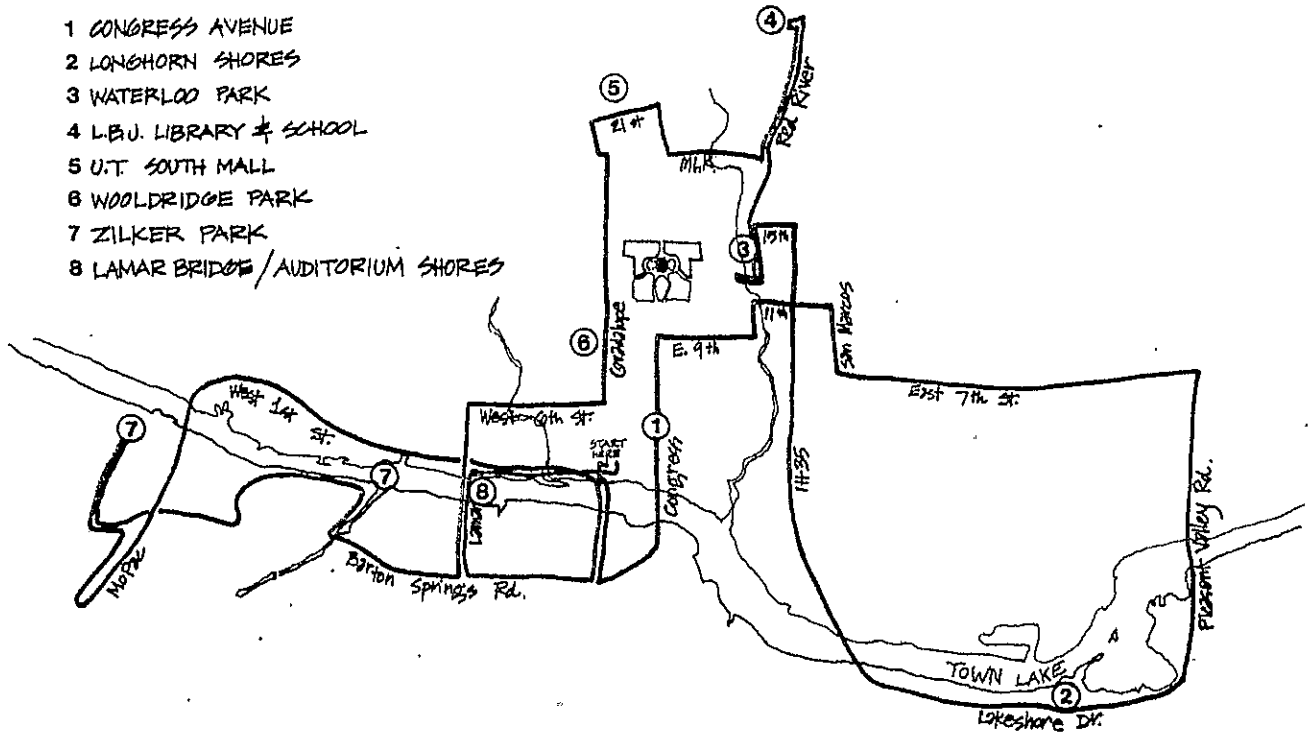
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experiences.

Members of the Downtown Revitalization Task Force, the Planning Commission and the Historical Landmark Commission went on a bus tour to assess the Capitol views under study in August 1982.

The Route

- 1 CONGRESS AVENUE
- 2 LONGHORN SHORES
- 3 WATERLOO PARK
- 4 L.B.U. LIBRARY & SCHOOL
- 5 U.T. SOUTH MALL
- 6 WOOLDRIDGE PARK
- 7 ZILKER PARK
- 8 LAMAR BRIDGE/AUDITORIUM SHORES



Response from the tour and consultation with the Capitol View Preservation Subcommittee of the Downtown Revitalization Task Force led to further refinement of the view corridors.

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VII. ANALYSIS

View corridors can be grouped into five categories:

1. Corridors where private property would be somewhat restricted;
 2. Corridors where private property would be more restricted;
 3. Corridors where most property is publicly-owned;
 4. A corridor with established boundaries; and
 5. Dramatic glimpses.
1. In corridors where private property would be somewhat restricted, viewpoints are at a sufficient distance from the Capitol, and at such elevations, that relatively tall buildings in the CBD would not interfere with Capitol views. Most height allowances in these view corridors vary only moderately from current designations in the Zoning Ordinance or conform to actual building heights in their vicinity. It is assumed that an overlay zone could be applied to these view corridors without unreasonably diminishing the development potential of the properties therein.
 2. In other view corridors, application of an overlay zone would require negotiations with private property owners. These negotiations would establish design requirements for each parcel and determine the special provisions appropriate if the restriction is shown to deny a reasonable economic return for development. Parcel ownership patterns and market conditions are key factors in implementing view protection in these corridors.

A market analysis of selected properties within the following view corridors is necessary to determine whether they belong in category 1 or 2.

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Wooldridge Park

Zilker Park

Longhorn Shores

Lamar Bridge

IH-35

3. In corridors where most property is publicly-owned, State legislation to accomplish view protection is recommended for corridors containing mostly state-owned land. Cooperation between the State and City is essential in these corridors:

Waterloo Park

UT South Mall

LBJ Presidential Library

4. Boundaries of the Congress Avenue Capitol View corridor correspond with those of the Congress Avenue National Register District from 11th to 1st Streets. Congress Avenue differs from other view corridors in that the width of the Avenue is sufficient to protect the view of the dome from Barton Springs Road to 11th Street. Since actual view obstruction is not at issue, and since the Historic Landmark Commission has review authority over development in the National Register District, guidelines should be coordinated with the Landmark Commission to assure that development enhances the Capitol.

Pedestrian views from 9th to 11th Streets include the Capitol dome and wings and can be protected by working with the State, which owns the corner lots at Congress and 11th.

5. Dramatic glimpses, brief but spectacular views that can be seen from

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vantage points outside the major composite view corridors, have also been identified. The same Height Calculation Formula used in the major view corridors would be applied to all properties along the sightlines from dramatic glimpse viewpoints to the Capitol.

Identification of these views for priority protection does not preclude additional designations. Neighborhood groups, once introduced to the aims, scope, and methodology of this study, can supplement view preservation efforts by suggesting neighborhood vantage points for future protection.

DRAMATIC GLIMPSES

Capitol of Texas Highway Overlook

Enfield at Parkway

Riverside Drive from 5200 to Pleasant Valley Road

Red Bud Trail at Bee Creek Preserve

Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard at Hilldale, at Springdale and at Airport Boulevard

Manor Road at Mueller Airport

Red River from 38th to 30th

Lamar at Panter Trail

East 7th at Hergotz and at Airport Boulevard

Rosewood at Hargrave

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VIII. VIEW PROTECTION IN OTHER CITIES

In addition to the legal research and court cases cited, the Capitol View Preservation Study has investigated view protection efforts in other cities. Of the numerous examples available, the following list includes only those cities whose techniques correspond with those found pertinent to the requirements of the present study.

Lincoln, Nebraska

Identification of near and distant Capitol viewpoints creates ten major view corridors; a City ordinance limits the height of buildings within these corridors. State legislation reinforces the city ordinance.

London, England

Sightlines from important viewpoints to St. Paul's Cathedral are proposed as the building height determinants within view corridors.

New York, New York

The Zoning Ordinance includes Special Scenic View Districts to preserve outstanding views from public places by controlling the height of buildings and signs. Again, the sightline determines allowable building heights.

View preservation is an emerging body of legislation. The City of Austin is among a pioneering group in its attempt to find a method for preserving Capitol views. Citizens of Austin and of Texas, observers in American cities and international capitals, are waiting to see if a Sunbelt City, given the development pressures that status entails, can act on the authority of its Austin Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan, with the power granted by the U.S. and State constitutions, to preserve the most unique feature of its visible heritage.

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Capitol view preservation is a landmark opportunity that could prove as evanescent as the views from Mt. Bonnell, St. Edward's University, and Taniguchi Gardens, or it could serve as a precedent for enriching and strengthening Austin, as well as other cities.

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FOOTNOTES

- 1 Henry-Russell Hitchcock and William Seale, Temples of Democracy: The State Capitols of the U.S.A., Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, N.Y., N.Y., 1976, p. 187.
- 2 Hitchcock, Temples of Democracy, p. 3.
- 3 Diane Susan Jones, The Preservation of the Texas Capitol, University of Texas, Austin, Texas, 1980.
- 4 Mary Goff, Mary Goff's Scrapbook.
- 5 Yi-Fu Tuan, Space and Place, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1981, p. 159.
- 6 Lewis Mumford, The Urban Prospect, Harcourt, Brace and World, N.Y., N.Y., 1968, p. 254.
- 7 Henry Grover, Austin American Statesman, 2/11/65.